

THE DOMINANT IDEOLOGY: THE ELIZABETHAN WORLD PICTURE

- Many have written about a shared cultural and cosmological view of order during the Elizabethan period: Tillyard's *Elizabethan World Picture* and *Shakespeare's History Plays*, C. S. Lewis's *The Discarded Image*, Theodore Spencer's *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man*, Lily B. Campbell's *Shakespeare's Histories*
- Recent materialist criticism has identified these pronouncements as the dominant ideology of the period, but certainly not the only ideology and certainly not Shakespeare's only way of looking at the world. Dollimore and Sinfield: "[Lily B. Campbell) and Tillyard demonstrate unquestionably that there was an ideological position, something like 'the Elizabethan World picture,' and that it is a significant presence in Shakespeare's plays."
- Materialist critics and others contend that Shakespeare surely deployed the dominant ideology but certainly not as "an ideological legitimation of an existing social order" as Tillyard and others would have us believe.
- Tillyard claims that "The Elizabethans pictured the universal order under three main forms: a chain, a series of corresponding planes, and a dance." Let us look at some of these concepts so that we can recognize them when we come across them in Shakespeare's works. Tro. I.iii.85-124
Ulysses's speech on order

The Great Chain of Being

- The idea began with Plato, was developed by Aristotle, was adopted by the Alexanderian Jews (headed by Philo), was formulated by *neo-Platonists*, and became a common place assumption by the Middle Ages.
- One of its best expression can be found in Raymond Sebonde's *Natural Theology*:

1st	The <i>Inanimate Class</i> (mere existence) [<i>containing the</i> elements, liquids, metals]
2nd	The Vegetative Class (existence and life) [the mighty oak]
3rd	The Sensitive Class (existence, life, and feeling) a. creatures with touch, but not hearing (memory) or movement, like shellfish b. creatures with touch and movement, but not hearing, like insects c. higher animals with touch, movement, and hearing, like horses and dogs
4th	Man (existence, life, feeling, and understanding) Thomas Browne "Thus Man that great and true Amphibian whose nature is disposed to live, not only like other creatures in divers elements, but in divided and distinguished worlds."
5th	The Angels a. Third Order (Principalities, Archangels, Angels) (Active: intermediaries between angelic hierarchy and man) b. Second Order (Dominations, Virtues, Powers) (Less Active) c. First Order (Seraphs, Cherubs, Thrones) [Contemplative and closest to God]
6th	GOD [Outside of all]

The Ptolemaic Universe

- Another expression of God's changeless order was through the Ptolemaic Universe.
Earth, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Stellatum (Fixed Stars), Primum Mobile
- The stars were taken to dictate change in sublunary things. All things above the moon were immutable while all below were imperfect and subject to mutability or change. Thus, paradoxically, Man is the center of the universe yet the Earth is debased and is furthest from God.

The Wheel of Fortune

- Fortune was often expressed through the metaphor of the wheel.

The Music of the Spheres

- It was further believed that there was an angelic group that inhabited each of the nine spheres and when these spheres moved they were thought to create music, either by angels singing or by the differences in speeds between the spheres. Fallen man could no longer hear the music of the spheres. MV 5.1.54ff. Further, was the notion that the universe itself was in a state of perpetual dance.

The Corresponding Plans

If the entire universe was an expression of God's plan, then it followed that all things in the universe were related to each other in some way or another. This was expressed through the concept of corresponding planes, which can be grouped into the following:

1. The Divine or Angelic
2. The Universe or the Macrocosm
3. The Commonwealth or Body Politic
4. Man or the Microcosm
5. The Lower Creatures

Within each of these planes or subdivisions there existed other hierarchies all headed by the Primate of highest member of that class:

- God, among angels
- The Sun, among the planets and the stars
- The King, among men
- Husband, among the family
- The Lion, among animals
- The Eagle, among birds
- The Oak, among trees
- The Rose, among flowers

- Fire, among the elements
- Gold, among the minerals
- By extension if there were a disruption in one sphere or plane that disruption would also be reflected in another:
 - JC--storms portents
 - R2--trees wither, meteors fall from the sky
 - 1H4--birth of Glendower
 - Macbeth--storm after Duncan's death
 - Coriolanus--rebellion of the belly

All, however, was not as well-ordered or comforting as some would have us believe. This was also a time of great transitions and challenges to the existing order.

John Donne: "The New Philosophy calls all in doubt; the element of fire is quite put out."

Machiavelli	political science
Montaigne	social science
Copernicus	astronomy, science

The Dialectic

W. R. Elton:

"Shakespeare's drama provided an appropriate conflict structure: a dialectic of ironies and ambivalences, avoiding in its complex movement and multi-voiced dialogue the simplification of direct statement and reductive resolution."

John Barton:

"[Shakespeare] likes verbal complexity but is often simple and direct. His thoughts naturally shape themselves antithetically . . . He loves ambiguity and paradox. He delights in the sheer act of expressing himself and in handling seemingly impossible situations."